

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, June 21, 2009

GETTING COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS TO STICK

Campaign *n* a planned and organized series of actions intended to achieve a specific goal

A client recently requested us to address the issue of marketers changing campaigns annually. “What are the causes behind this?” they asked. “And, what can we do to manage communication campaigns more effectively?”

Obviously, we are not dealing with campaigns when the action is singular in nature. As Andy Langer, Chief Creative Officer, Roberts & Tarlow Advertising, is fond of saying “a campaign is more than one in a row.” And we agree! It’s more than one execution in a row. It’s even more than one year in a row. In fact we believe that effective campaigns can last for years. The MasterCard “Priceless” campaign is in its twelfth year and continues to produce solid growth, even in this difficult economic environment. The campaign has spawned over 500 television commercials and multi-fold that number of print ads during its life thus far. It has also enabled MasterCard to surpass Visa, an admirable goal.

A campaign is a straight line. One execution element follows another. Each execution of the campaign is tied together by an idea. It is not random messaging that jumps from one point to another. Nor is it random messaging tied together by a particular style of execution. The fact of the matter is that jumping around from one message to another means the client company didn’t have a campaign to begin with.

Reasons for Changes

The real question then is “what are the reasons for the frequent messaging changes?” Here’s what we observe in descending order:

5. **Not tracking results** - Neither the marketers nor their organizations know what they are getting from their communications. They don’t identify their expectations up front of what they want the communications to achieve. And, because they have no expectations there really isn’t any tracking being undertaken and analysis being conducted in the marketplace to inspect for what they should expect.
4. **Change in personnel** – Changes in marketing or agency management will instigate changing messaging. Not-invented-here syndrome prompts new managers to make and even demand, changes. Ego is another factor. The new kid on the team believes s/he can do better than his predecessors and is eager to prove it. Making changes is also a way to leave one’s mark.

With the frequent and rapid changes in assignments marketing managers are evaluated on the basis of what projects have been accomplished as opposed to what results they've generated. Many managers move on to a new assignment before the results of their deeds are known, if ever (see above point).

3. **Reaction to competitive messaging** – New messaging by competitors incites reaction as opposed to invites analysis. It's curious that while many marketers do not show a healthy respect for their competitors they are quick to be led by them into changing their messaging and moving off point. This becomes particularly acute when the sales force gets into the act. If the sales force is made to feel uncomfortable by customer comments regarding competitors' messaging they will pressure marketing to change the messaging. And when marketers don't know the results of their communications they have little recourse but to cave to the pressure.
2. **Selling products versus marketing brands** – Selling products is talking about the physical characteristics that make-up the product, its features. A product is typically comprised of many features. So there are a lot of different points to message. Marketers will jump from one feature to another with each new messaging. This is compounded when competitors change the dialogue as mentioned in the aforementioned point. Marketing a brand is about communicating its positioning (as in Brand Positioning Strategy) and a specific message (i.e., the Key Thought of the Communication Strategy) that reflects the positioning in such a way as to change attitudes to achieve a needed customer behavior. But if the marketer does not have a clear brand positioning and a strategically appropriate com strategy then s/he does not have a focal point for messaging. And if the marketer has not identified a behavioral objective then there's no tie between messaging and results. Consequently s/he does not know what meaning s/he needs to establish in the messaging to drive preference. So s/he bounces around from message to message, from execution to execution.
1. **Absence of a Campaign Idea** – The Campaign Idea is a dramatization of the brand's Communication Strategy (i.e., the Key Thought, belief or benefit, that needs to be communicated in order to achieve a desired customer behavior) in compelling customer language. It consists of: a) the "naked idea" or creative concept; b) key copy words that communicate the benefit consistent with the idea; and c) a core dramatization that brings the benefit to life for customers. All three pieces work together to create a single-minded message that resonates with customers. This thing we call a Campaign Idea is the soul of the campaign that ties one execution to another. Unfortunately, the vast majority of communications lack a Campaign Idea.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS

What can we do to get ***campaigns that stick*** to customers and endure for years? Here are some suggestions for your consideration:

1. **Differentiate or Die** – Jack Trout wrote a book with this for a title, "Differentiate or Die." We need to differentiate our Brand Positioning Strategy and the Key Thought (i.e., benefit/belief) in the Communication Strategy. This differentiation ***must be relevant*** to a carefully chosen strategic target. In addition to being relevant it ***must be meaningfully***

differentiated versus competitors. So start by checking your Brand Positioning Strategy Statement. If you don't have one then develop one! Next check the Communication Strategy portion of your Creative Brief to ensure that the Key Thought differentiates your messaging in a way to stimulate achievement of the Communication Behavior Objective (e.g., switching).

2. ***Develop Compelling Campaign Ideas*** – Best practice is to conduct a *tissue meeting* to review Campaign Ideas. A tissue meeting is where the agency shares very roughly displayed ideas. The word “tissue” denotes tracing or easel paper. There are not comps or storyboards. They are nothing more than creative concepts – an illustration with a set of key copy words and a sentence or two (i.e., the “naked idea”) that describes how the Key Thought will be communicated in each and every execution to the target customer. Tissue meetings put the focus where it belongs – on the idea! And because these are rough or raw ideas the dynamics of the session invite collaboration to add-value to the productivity of the idea. Tissue meetings that focus on Campaign Ideas will put the spotlight on generating BIG ideas and improve the quantity and quality of the ideas you receive.
3. ***Pre-Check Campaign Ideas with Customers*** – Enlist your marketing research managers to get a dialogue going with customers regarding the ideas. What message do the ideas communicate? Is the message relevant? Different than competition? What is the purchase interest? Intent to prescribe or utilize? This should not be a pass or fail test but a way to assist in iterating ideas that appear to have merit.

Once you have identified Campaign Ideas with the potential to achieve the Communications Behavior Objective the marketer is ready to go to the next step of development (e.g., comps or storyboards to animatics). This step should also include marketing research to determine if the execution succeeds in generating the intended behaviors you seek to achieve with target customers.

4. ***Measure the Results in the Marketplace*** – Inspect what you expect. What you “expect” is to achieve the Communication Behavior Objective, a specific customer behavior such as switching. We do not want to hear that this is difficult to measure or not being measured because if the marketer is not measuring outcomes then s/he is not managing the business. The business is managing him. Find a way to measure outcomes against going-in expectations. Find it or we will not be able to get communications campaigns to stick. We may not even be able to hold onto our communication funding.
5. ***Develop Exploratory Campaigns*** – No, this is not an encouragement to switch campaigns. This is about being ready when a campaign you have been measuring begins to falter. The worse time to begin campaign development is when you need it in a hurry. Emotions and time pressures will play havoc on communication campaign development. The marketer will settle for creative that is less than, well, compelling creative. And the cycle of change will be perpetuated because the pressure will grow with each failure.
6. ***Hold Tight*** – The expression when it comes to playing poker is to “know when to hold them and to know when to fold them.” Same thing goes for communication campaigns. If you are measuring outcomes then you will know what action you should be taking. And, if you decide it is time for a new campaign then you should have very clear rationale, based upon

unshakable facts, why you need to change and what you need to do. If you have developed and measured exploratory campaigns then you can compare results versus the current campaign to ensure that if you change you are making a change for the better and not changing for the sake of change. If you are measuring outcomes from the present campaign and they remain positive then the burden of proof for any change is on you.

We hope this stimulates your thinking about ways you can make your communication campaign stick!

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